

Tour kicks off West Side preservation efforts

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Pope John Paul II and President Barack Obama are among the historic figures who have visited Guadalupe Plaza on the West Side.

But for various reasons, some related to differences in the way people define progress, many feel the area known as Avenida Guadalupe has lost far too many of its historic riches.

The city of San Antonio's Office of Historic Preservation now is helping the Westside Historic Preservation Group develop a survey of properties, from historic churches and Victorian-style homes to tiny "shotgun houses" on narrow side streets.

"Paseo por el Westside," a community festival with walking tours, was among the first of many events the office is staging in May for Preservation Month.

Elizabeth Porterfield, architectural historian with the city, is working with the neighborhood to recruit volunteers to help with the survey. Part of the West Side's historic significance comes in the form of stories about individuals there, she said.

"There certainly is architectural significance here, but I think historic and cultural significance as well," Porterfield said.

Because of its early 1900s housing, the city has identified an area of Prospect Hill, bounded by Durango Boulevard on the south, Buena Vista Street on the north and Brazos and Zarzamora streets on the east and west, as a potential historic district.

The West Side group also is trying to protect buildings several blocks south, on and along Guadalupe Street, through designation of individual structures. It now is feuding with the Avenida Guadalupe Association to save Casa Maldonado, 1312 Guadalupe.

Graciela Sánchez, who is leading an effort to save the 1920s building, said it has ties to Bill Maldonado, a pioneering West Side political figure and reflects the architecture of a working-class, heavily Mexican American community.

The city has begun a process to determine if Casa Maldonado, also known as "the pink building," merits protection as a historically significant structure. The Avenida Guadalupe Association wants to replace it with a 21,000-square-foot building for workforce development training and retail and commercial office space, as part of a federal aided \$5.5 million Promesa Project.

“They're thinking about economic development, but it's at the cost of the history of this neighborhood,” Sánchez said.

Avenida officials have said the building is structurally unstable.

“This building's history does not rise to the level of designation,” Oscar Ramirez, association president/CEO, said in a news release.

The case awaits review by the Zoning Commission and City Council.

Other Preservation Month events include running and walking tours, and an “Amazing Preservation Race” for children on May 21 in the King William Historic District. For more information, see the Office of Historic Preservation website, www.sanantonio.gov/historic.

Read more: http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/local_news/article/West-Side-tours-lead-Preservation-Month-1370348.php#ixzz1NwfouvAD